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PSB D-24/1
January 19, 1953

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W O R K I N G  D R A F T

PSB Paper No. D-24 of November 1, 1952 entitled "Psychological Preparation for Stalin's Passing from Power" includes the following recommendation:

6 c. To avoid uncoordinated action in case of sudden death, an agreed Government position should be prepared at once, as a basis for stand-by instructions for the period immediately following this contingency.

There is general agreement among those who have given consideration to this problem that the exact conditions which will exist at the time of Stalin's death, be it on the international scene or within the Soviet power structure, cannot be foreseen. In the absence of such information, it is impossible to issue intelligent stand-by instructions to information media for the period immediately following Stalin's death except in the most general terms. The aim of such instructions should be not the immediate most effective exploitation of the factors in the situation favorable to the advancement of United States objectives, but the avoidance of blunders which will prevent or complicate the exploitation of such factors after the situation can be thoroughly assessed. It is believed, therefore, that all information media under United States Government control, both overt and covert, should be given standing instructions that in the event of Stalin's death they should limit themselves to strictly factual reporting pending the receipt of specific guidance. Such guidance should be forthcoming with a minimum of delay in order to take maximum advantage of the situation in the United States interest.

The reaction of the Soviet people to Stalin's death is not easy to predict. Certainly there will be those who will feel that a heavy yoke has been lifted from the Russian people and that Stalin's passing affords the opportunity for beneficial change. Available evidence, however, seems to indicate that the great mass of the population has been sufficiently drugged by years of public adulation of Stalin and sufficiently impressed by the growth of Soviet power under his leadership to ensure a widespread feeling of genuine regret at his passing. It is important that in our eagerness to capitalize on the situation our information media do nothing which would do violence to this feeling if it indeed materializes. Nor is there any valid reason to believe that the security authorities will not be able to cope with the situation; premature appeals for violence or resistance are therefore also to be avoided.

One question which should be susceptible to advance determination is that of the course to be followed by this Government with respect to extending the customary official condolences. Three possible variations suggest themselves: (1) the despatch of a routine message to the Soviet Government; (2) the deliberate omission of such a message; (3) the omission of an official message while transmitting through United States information media a message to the Soviet people taking note of Stalin's death, extending to them the hand of friendship and inviting their cooperation in seeking a peaceful and secure world.



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The first course is probably one which will be followed by most governments maintaining diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union unless the United States Government takes the initiative in securing advance agreement to some other proposal. Should we follow this course, strong adverse criticism of the Government may be anticipated both from anti-communist circles in the United States and from all emigre groups, Soviet and satellite. Furthermore, an opportunity would be lost to give encouragement to any potential resistance elements within the Soviet Union which might consider Stalin's death a favorable occasion to expand their activities.

Complete silence on the part of the United States might be exploited by Soviet propaganda in one of two ways. It might be played down, in which event it would probably go unnoticed by the mass of the population; the absence of formal messages from one or another government in the long list of published communications spread over several days requires careful reading to be detected. Or our silence might be interpreted as a deliberate affront to the Soviet people and a further example of American hostility; if the feelings of grief at Stalin's death are genuine, this line might be not without effect.

The third alternative steers a middle course; it forestalls the criticism and resentment which would be occasioned by a formal message to the Soviet Government, while at the same time offering reassurances to the Soviet people. More importantly, it enables the United States to seize the psychological initiative and thereafter to exploit the developing situation as our interests may dictate. It is recommended that plans be developed to enable us to pursue this course. When such plans are completed they should be discussed with other governments, particularly the NATO countries, in an effort to obtain widespread adherence to this course of action.



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